

Refreshing Voices from Germany

HAIM KANTOROVITCH

"Socialism's New Start". A secret German Manifesto by Miles, with a preface by H. N. Brailsford. N.C.L.C. Publishing Society, Ltd. London. 142 pgs. Price two shillings.*

I

Germany again. Readers may complain. Yes, Germany again, and whether we like it or not it will be Germany for quite a time to come. The great work of critical analysis and appraisal of the rise and decline of the revolutionary movement in Germany is certainly not finished. It is just beginning. Just as Marx utilized the revolutions and counter-revolutions of his time in order to study the laws of revolutions of his age, so we will have to study the revolutions and counter-revolutions of our time to learn the general laws of revolution in our time.

"Socialism's New Start," a secret German manifesto by Miles,** is a fine and really important beginning in this direction. Its fearless analysis and criticism of the social democratic and communist parties and its Marxist analysis of the rise and essence of fascism, is at this time probably of greater importance for the countries where fascism has not yet arrived, than for countries like Germany and Austria where fascism is already in power. What Miles has to say is history to the fascist countries, but it is a grim warning to the socialists of the democratic countries. In his preface to the British edition, H. N. Brailsford says: "The problems . . . with

*A' special American Edition "Socialism's New Beginning", is now being published by the League for Industrial Democracy, New York, with a special American preface by Norman Thomas, in addition to the Brailsford preface. Price 35 cents.

**The book though signed by "Miles" is believed to represent the expression of a group rather than that of an individual comrade.

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which this group is grappling, are also in some degree our own. The capitalist reaction has not yet fallen upon us with the brutal intensity that it has developed in Germany. But for us also at home, as well as abroad, the liberal era of capitalism is ended. We too are faced, if not by a "totalitarian" capitalist state, at least by a politically united capitalist class. For us also the slump has been the signal for the coming of a new phase of imperialism. We too have hugged our illusions about the value and permanence of political democracy. We, too, were tempted under impotent labor governments to forget our goal, the conquest of economic power, for us also a 'new start' based on clear and courageous thinking is imperative."

This long quotation from Brailsford's preface is reproduced because it seems that he speaks not only for Great Britain, but for the entire Socialist International. "A new start based on clear and courageous thinking" is imperative at present for the entire Socialist International. It may even be more important for the American party than for the large and strong European parties. Just because the American socialist movement is as yet small and weak, just because it is as yet facing, not the problem of conquering and holding power, but the problem of organizing an American Socialist Party, it is well for it to clearly understand what is it organizing for. The entire tactic and strategy of a party is after all based on its ideas of probable future events. American conditions may be radically different from conditions in other countries; the psychology and the traditions of the American masses may be different from the masses of other countries. This difference must certainly not be overlooked by American Socialists. American Socialists can not simply take over European ideas and make them their own without adapting them to the specific American conditions under which they will have to be applied. It would however be wrong and even harmful to stress these national differences to a point where all similarities between capitalism, fascism and Socialism of other countries, are forgotten. Moreover American capitalism has shown itself to be a good and dili-

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gent pupil of European capitalism. Its Americanism does not prevent it from following in the footsteps of European capitalism, when it finds it profitable.

II

For the world at large, the leaders of German Socialism are still the old leaders of the old German Social Democratic Party, Otto Wels, Stampfer, Hilferding. The socialists, however, who remained in Germany and who are conducting their illegal socialist work under the conditions of the Hitler dictatorship no longer recognize these leaders. The author (or authors) of "Socialism's New Start" have very little that is good to say about these leaders. They believe on the contrary that the old leaders have learned very little from their own tragic experiences. They do of course understand that the struggle against Hitlerism in Germany can be neither legal nor democratic, that this struggle must be revolutionary. But, what do they hope for? What, according to them, should be the objective of the proletarian struggle in Hitler's Germany? They look forward, the author says, to a new Weimar constitution.

What the socialists in Germany think of their erstwhile leaders may be summarized from the following paragraph in the introduction to the book:

"One more word with regard to the social democrats in exile. They themselves have emphatically stated that the new leadership of the party would be born out of the struggle in Germany, and that the only task of the old officials in exile would be to leave the field clear for it. Very well, this new leadership is now knocking at the door. It will fulfil its task as it has fulfilled them up to the present moment. The time has now come for the old officials of the party abroad to keep the promise with which they took up their propaganda work in exile."

An appeal like this may sound very strange to the average reader. The leaders who are appealed to now, to leave the new party alone, are the people with knowledge and experience who have performed great services for the German Socialist movement in the past. It was they who built up that powerful German movement. Is it their fault that ob-

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jective conditions beyond their control have destroyed everything that they created? Karl Kautsky has indeed published an article in defense of the old leadership. His article was a pathetic appeal to the new movement not to discard the old leaders. It is not rare in the history of movements that leaders who were not only necessary but indispensable to a movement become its fetters. An old leadership that can not adapt itself to the new times, that may be too old to change its view according to new conditions, becomes the death hand that stifles the party which they helped to create. And old leaders will fight for their leadership! In time the conviction grows up with them that what is important is above all their leadership and not the movement itself. The conservatism of old party leaders has caused more harm to revolutionary parties than anything else.

Criticism of the old party and party leadership in "Socialism's New Start" is unsparing. The German Social Democratic Party could not have organized a fighting revolutionary party, because it has given up the idea of the class-struggle. It has "regarded the interest of the working class and the employers as essentially identical (although they might differ in details) and equally depended on the welfare of the bourgeois state and the prosperity of capitalist economy. It had in all doubtful cases, to marshal its forces in support of this state and the maintenance of the capitalist system."

Those who know anything about the post-war theories of social reformism will easily recognize in this the theory that Socialism cannot be introduced while capitalism is sick. It is the theory of "approaching capitalism not only as heirs but also as physicians," a theory embraced, whether expressly or indirectly by many socialist parties and socialist leaders of the purely democratic type.

But the author of "Socialism's New Start" does not content himself with repudiating the theories and tactics of the German Social Democratic Party during the post-war period. He thinks that the roots of the evil lay much further back than the post-war era. The German Social Democratic Party is said to have been a revolutionary Marxist party before the

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war. During the war it changed Marxism for revisionism and lost its revolutionary character. Miles does not agree with this. It is, he believes, "an illusion to think that German social democracy was at heart a revolutionary Marxist party up till August 1914. . . . Its objective had always been at the most, a bourgeois democratic republic." Of course, fighting for a democratic republic under the monarchy was in itself revolutionary. This the author admits.

This criticism of the pre-war history of the German Social Democratic Party is treated very inadequately in the book. On the face of it, it does not sound true. An examination of the theoretical literature of pre-war German Social Democracy will show that it clung vehemently to Marxian doctrines, and such concepts as the class struggle, social revolution and even the dictatorship of the proletariat. The trouble with the German party was, and this is now happening in many other parties, that it completely divorced its theory from its practice; clinging to Marxism in theory it completely disregarded it in practice.

III

The German revolution was not made by the German social democrats. But that does not mean that the German workers did not make the revolution. It is true, the revolution was the result of the defeat in war, but right after the collapse of the monarchy the workers of Germany remained the only class in society that was capable of taking over the state, of reforming it, and using it. Political power was not conquered by the German socialists. It was turned over to them by the former rulers because it was the party representing the only revolutionary class in society. The leaders of German social democracy were not revolutionary minded. They did not want a revolution. But the workers were in a revolutionary mood. The situation was revolutionary. The workers looked up to their leaders, and what did these leaders do?

"In order to protect this bourgeois republic from the impetuosity of masses and the advance of the revolu-

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tion, it disarmed the proletariat in a series of sanguinary struggles, but on the other hand armed the bands of officers, the reactionary 'Burgerwehren' and supported the Free Corps,—in short all those reactionary organizations out of which grew up the N. S. D. A. P." (the Nazi-party.)

In the years following the revolution social democracy remained true to its social reformist principles and tactics. The "interests of the bourgeois state" always took precedence over the interest of the working class. Instead of treason to their socialist principles they called it being practical, (How American it sounds!) and prided themselves with their "sense of responsibility." Karl Kautsky gave a true picture of the German Social Democratic Party when he said in his "Bolshevism at a Deadlock," that "The German Social Democratic Party was transformed after the revolution of 1918 into a conservative party, for a revolution after the revolution is inconceivable."

The leaders of the German Social Democratic Party were too old and too conservative for the new times. They approached and evaluated the new revolutionary situation from their old liberal-democratic point of view, which they had held for decades. They could not realize that this epoch of liberal-democratic capitalism had ended, that the decline of capitalism had set in, and that this era of decline of capitalism makes necessary a strongly centralized class-dictatorship. This dictatorship seems to be unavoidable. It is only a question which class shall exercise it. The German Social Democratic Party refused to exercise it, and it was left for Hitler to do so.

The book also contains interesting and valuable chapters on the Communist tactics which helped Hitler achieve his victory, and the economic background of fascism, of Soviet Russia and other important subjects. Space does not permit the analysis of these chapters separately. No review can do justice to this book anyhow. The reader will have to read it for himself.